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HOMEMAKERS' CHAT

Wednesday, May 15, 1940.

Subject: "COTTON MATTRESSES." Information from Extension Service.

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Secretary Wallace took a ~~sew~~ sewing lesson not long ago. He actually put in some stitches in the course of a mattress making demonstration at the U.S. Department of Agriculture. And Dorothy Jones, the 4-H club girl from Texas who is helping with the demonstration, marked off the stretch the Secretary worked on, so she could point it out when the mattress was finished.

The reason the Secretary was so interested in this demonstration of mattress making was that it showed one of the important uses of cotton. Beautiful, fluffy, white, long staple cotton, grown in one of our 15 southern states. And the Secretary has given considerable attention this spring to the problem of surplus cotton, and how more of it can be used. You remember, no doubt, that not long ago, the Department started a "cotton stamp" plan, which works very much like the food stamp plan, and helps needy low-income families to have more cotton clothing and cotton articles in their homes. And for several years the F.S.C.C. has turned over cotton and cotton ticking to State welfare agencies for use in State relief programs.

New and better mattresses are one of the things a great many of the low-income families need badly and cannot afford to buy. So another plan has been devised. Under it they can get new cotton mattresses if they are willing to help make them. This plan has been started in a great many centers and operates through the Extension Service. The Federal Surplus Commodity Corporation and the Agricultural Adjustment Administration have agreed to supply the cotton filling and cotton ticking to eligible families if they will sign up for the work of making the mattresses. And the

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Extension agents are teaching these people how to put the mattresses together properly so the mattresses will give good service for many years.

To be "eligible" for free mattress material, a family must show that its total yearly income is less than \$400. In one small town in central Texas 24 bales of the surplus cotton and 2 bales of ticking were allotted for mattress making. As there are 500 pounds in a bale of cotton and it takes 50 pounds to make a double bed mattress, the people in that one place will make 240 mattresses. The same arrangement holds for other places throughout the south.

Extension workers train local leaders, both men and women, to make mattresses. Then the leaders pass on what they learn to farm people who have received surplus cotton. As the mattress needles and strong cord cost but a few cents, these families will have fine, durable, comfortable mattresses at very little expense. They will also show other families how to make mattresses.

Many other farm families who don't live in cotton growing states and who cannot afford a ready-made mattress might also make their own. The cash investment for the cotton and the ticking is very small. Cotton is sold by the "bat", or by the pound. It is easiest to use when it comes in flat layers.

The equipment for mattress making is simple. You need a solid top work table large enough to carry the mattress flat. That is, 83 inches long, 61 inches wide, and its top 36 inches from the floor, or at the best working height for the persons who are to make the mattress. If you have no table, you can make a scaffold. You can just use saw horses and wide boards, and stretch a cover of cheap, clean white material over it to keep the ticking clean. Then you'll need a 7-inch, 12-gauge mattress needle for sewing the roll edge, strong cord, number 20 cotton thread and needles to carry it, two broomstick handles for beating, pins, tape-measure, yardstick, scissors, beeswax, and a whisk broom. Ice pick handles with the picks removed are useful for pushing roll needles. You need scales to weight the layers of cotton.

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There are several little tricks to making and filling the mattress properly. If you want to learn those tricks you might get in touch with your state extension agent, and ask for detailed directions. For example, for moving the mattress about, you stitch handles on the sides of the ticking; and use tucks or darts to take up fullness in the rounded corners. Then you need to take special care to lay the cotton up into the corners to fill them nicely.

The general procedure is to make the tick, spread it on the table, and fill it layer by layer until the 50 pounds of cotton is used up. After each layer is carefully arranged in place, the top of the ticking is pinned down temporarily and the broomsticks come into play. The mattress is beaten all over with a special, brisk stroke that fluffs up the cotton and makes the mattress more comfortable to sleep on. When the cotton is all in, you pin down the top part of the tick carefully and firmly and sew the top on by hand all around. That's the sewing at which Secretary Wallace tried his hand. When the mattress is all sewed together the roll edge is made. Then you beat the mattress and sun it on both sides every day for about two weeks. No tufting is needed.

You would use about the same steps as these for making cushions for a window seat or studio couch, or seats for chairs or chaise lounges, or the top of a covered blanket chest or hope box, tufting them if you like.

The demonstrators at the U. S. Department of Agriculture laid great stress on the after care given a new mattress. They recommend sunning and beating every week if possible, or at least once a month; turning from side to side and from end to end very often. To keep a mattress clean use a washable mattress slip cover and mattress pad, and protect the mattress from the springs by covering them, too.

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